



Ombudsman launches new inquiry on transparency of Commission interactions with the tobacco industry

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The European Ombudsman [has opened an own-initiative inquiry \[Link\]](#) to assess how the European Commission ensures that its interactions with tobacco interest representatives are transparent.

To get an overview of the situation, the Ombudsman has asked to inspect documents held by the Commission concerning all interactions with tobacco lobbyists in 2020 and 2021, including requests for public access to documents concerning such interactions.

The inquiry is a follow up to previous initiatives by the Ombudsman in this area. In July 2021, European Ombudsman Emily O'Reilly [wrote to \[Link\]](#) Commission President Ursula von der Leyen to remind her of the Commission's obligations regarding interactions with the tobacco industry. A previous [Ombudsman inquiry \[Link\]](#), which concluded in December 2016, found the Commission was failing to meet its obligations.

As a party to the [Framework Convention on Tobacco Control \[Link\]](#) (FCTC) of the World Health Organisation (WHO), the Commission has committed to prevent the tobacco industry from having a negative impact on public health policies. Among other things, this requires the Commission be fully and proactively transparent about meetings with representatives of the tobacco industry.



The Commission has made some improvements since the Ombudsman's previous inquiry: in addition to its department for health and food safety ([DG SANTE \[Link\]](#)), its department for taxation and customs ([DG TAXUD \[Link\]](#)) now also proactively publishes information about interactions with tobacco industry interest representatives.

However, for its other departments, the Commission does not proactively make public details on meetings that happen below the level of directors-general.

The Commission is expected to propose additional tobacco control measures, as part of its commitment to achieve a "tobacco-free generation" under the [Europe's Beating Cancer Plan \[Link\]](#), and such measures will likely be subject to lobbying from the tobacco industry. Failure to provide proper proactive transparency of any interactions with representatives of the tobacco industry could undermine full public scrutiny, which is required under the FCTC.

As part of the current inquiry, the Ombudsman has also asked to inspect any internal guidance that has been given to Commission staff. The Commission has been asked to reply within two months.